

Yanukovych Confirms No Plans to Take Ukraine into NATO

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Moscow — Ukraine has no intention of bidding to become a member of NATO, Viktor Yanukovych said on Friday as Western leaders congratulated him on winning the former Soviet republic's presidential polls.

A Ukrainian NATO bid pushed by outgoing President Viktor Yushchenko was strongly backed by the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush. But despite Washington's enthusiasm, it was turned down at a 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest due to pressure from Germany and France, who were concerned that the move would antagonize Russia.

NATO stated however that Ukraine, along with fellow former Soviet republic Georgia, would join the alliance at an unspecified date in the future.

"There is no question of Ukraine joining NATO," Yanukovych said in an interview with Russia's Channel One.

"Ukraine is interested today in the development of a project to create a system of collective European security. We are ready to take part in this and support the initiative of Russia President Dmitry Medvedev," he went on, in a clear indication that the former premier will look to restore ties with Russia, soured in recent years over Ukraine's pro-Western policies.

U.S. President Barack Obama called Yanukovych on Thursday to congratulate him on winning Sunday's presidential runoff. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and European Union President Herman Van Rompuy sent a message to Yanukovych on Friday.

Yanukovych defeated his bitter rival Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko by a mere 3.5% in Sunday's polls, according to final preliminary results. The official results will be announced by February 17.

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